



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

What is RSV?

RSV causes respiratory illness mainly in children, but can infect people of all ages. In babies, young children, and adults with weakened immune systems, RSV may cause lower respiratory infection and pneumonia, and the infection may be very serious. In older children and healthy adults, the infection resembles the common cold. Most people are infected by age 2.

RSV is not a reportable disease so the number of cases is not known. However, the CDC reports that each year, 75,000 to 125,000 children in this age group are hospitalized due to RSV infection.

What are the symptoms of RSV?

In babies and young children, symptoms may include fever, cough, sneeze, wheezing, not hungry, difficulty breathing, and pneumonia. RSV symptoms in older children and adults include moderate-to-severe cold-like symptoms such as fever, runny nose, cough, and sometimes wheezing. Symptoms generally appear about 2-8 days after infection. Healthy infants infected with RSV do not need to be hospitalized. In most cases, even among those who need to be hospitalized, hospitalization usually last a few days, and recovery from illness usually occurs in about 1 to 2 weeks.

How is RSV spread?

RSV is spread by respiratory droplets from close contact with infected persons or contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. Infection can occur when RSV contacts the eyes, mouth, or nose, and possibly through inhaling droplets from a sneeze or cough. Infection can also result from direct and indirect contact with nasal or oral secretions from infected persons. Direct contact with the virus can occur, for example, by kissing the face of a person with RSV. RSV outbreaks generally occur during the winter months (Nov. - April).

Who is at risk for getting RSV?

Premature infants, children less than 2 years of age with congenital heart or chronic lung disease, and children with compromised (weakened) immune systems due to a medical condition or medical treatment are at highest risk for severe disease. Adults with compromised immune systems and those 65 and older are also at increased risk of severe disease.

How do I know if I have RSV?

See your healthcare provider. Your health care provider will review your symptoms and may take a swab of your throat or back of your nose to test at a lab.

How is RSV treated?

For mild disease, no specific treatment is necessary other than the treatment of symptoms (pain reliever, fever reducer). Patients with severe disease may require oxygen therapy or hospitalization. Special breathing treatments may be used in the treatment of some patients with severe disease. Your health care provider can recommend the best type of treatment.

How is RSV prevented?

Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently, especially after coughing or sneezing. Do not share items such as cups, drinking glasses and eating utensils with persons who have RSV. Exclude children from schools and child care if they have respiratory symptoms and fever and limit contact with other children. Excluding children with colds or other respiratory illnesses without fever who are well enough to attend child care or school will probably not decrease the transmission of RSV. Almost 100% of children who attend child care get RSV in the first year of life. Promptly throw away any used tissues after coughing or sneezing.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to the CDC website located at <http://www.cdc.gov/rsv/about/index.html>.

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